

Dear Chairs Williams and Lopes, Vice Chairs Smith and Anwar, Ranking Members Polletta and Cicarella, and Members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Julia Sulkowski and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for **H.B 5208 - An Act Concerning Housing Opportunities for Justice Impacted Persons**. This bill would make it a discriminatory practice for housing providers to not consider a prospective tenant based on a criminal conviction after certain time periods. Specifically, housing authorities would not be allowed to consider convictions of misdemeanors over 3 years before the rental application, or convictions of felony over 7 years before the rental application. It is imperative that it passes, to provide a second chance for many who have moved beyond convictions.

Currently in Connecticut, housing authorities can refuse to rent to any formerly incarcerated person, even for crimes committed many years ago. Barriers to reentry from the prison system are detrimental both to the formerly incarcerated and to the communities where those individuals come from. The lack of fair housing for formerly incarcerated people is a major roadblock for those trying to re-emerge in society, and contributes heavily to the "revolving door" of homelessness and punishment—including a state recidivism rate of 34%. Even for smaller misdemeanor charges without any conviction that happened years ago — such as conviction for conduct that occurred when the applicant was a minor — under present law, an applicant may be denied housing for that reason.

***Individuals who were previously incarcerated are statistically more likely to face homelessness or housing insecurity.** Approximately 25% of Connecticut's homeless population is living with a criminal record. According to a 2018 report from the Prison Policy initiative, people who have been incarcerated multiple times experience homelessness at rates 13 times higher than the general public. By not providing fair housing for formerly incarcerated people, Connecticut is perpetuating a cycle that funnels people in and out of the prison system and makes the re-entry process even more difficult for everyone involved. This process would be vastly improved by increased housing opportunities. According to three years of data (2016-2019) from the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness' (CCEH) Homeless Management System — 48% of people who utilized homeless shelters had a DOC criminal record.*

***This is not just a Connecticut problem but a national one.** 2020 Marshall Project survey currently incarcerated people across the country, asked what could have kept them out of prison - one of top answers was access to affordable housing. Study across 14 states found that 79% of formerly incarcerated people denied housing due to criminal conviction. Connecticut **MUST** take a stand and support all our constituents and residents. We cannot deny housing for formerly incarcerated individuals. Crimes and mistakes from our past should not shadow our future. Connecticut should be guiding and helping navigate the formerly incarcerated back into our community, not pushing them away.*

In conclusion, I urge you to provide a second chance at housing for those who committed crimes outside of the 3 and 7 year windows as outlined in H.B 5208. Instead of subjecting formerly incarcerated Connecticut residents to a cycle of criminalization — even for minor misdemeanors committed long ago — this state should seek to make the re-entry process as smooth as possible by mitigating the hardships that come when individuals emerge from prison. I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of the Housing Committee so that a second chance may be given to those who most need it.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Julia Sulkowski
New Haven, CT